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ABSTRACT

The Indiana Foreign Language Generic Competencies for Levels 1-4 define language-learning outcomes in terms of communicative competencies within generic cultural contexts. Nine cultural contexts (travel/transportation, the "world" of the target language, school and education, family and home, leisure time, meeting personal needs, world of work, fine arts, and politics and history) are more precisely defined by specific cultural situations. The communicative competency for each cultural context and within each specific cultural situation is a short description of what students should be able to do at the end of the level of instruction. The basic task is also defined with a list of language skills necessary to achieve the competency, the linguistic content (necessary grammar and vocabulary), and a suggested evaluation schema. Five existing proficiency rating scales simplified for classroom use and one new scale were developed in four areas: comprehensibility, amount of relevant information, structural accuracy, and level of performance. The competencies are used to develop culturally-oriented, competency-based lesson plans for classroom instruction and are intended to be tested and evaluated throughout the year. The paper includes examples of competencies for each level of instruction and an example of lesson-planning elements for the Level One competency of Food and Meals from the generic cultural context of Travel and Transportation. (MSE)

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6 Achieving Proficiency Goals through Competency Guidelines

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The Need for Proficiency Achievement Goals

Ever since the President's Commission on Foreign Language and International Studies issued its report in late 1979, the foreign language teaching profession has moved toward addressing one of the commission's major recommendations, the establishment of "language proficiency achievement goals for the end of each year of study at all levels, with special attention to speaking proficiency" (5). On the national level the issue of proficiency is being addressed by the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) through its development of proficiency guidelines. The ACTFL guidelines (7), however, only rank the learner's achievement and, therefore, although they are useful for determining professional competency and for curriculum planning, they fail to address instructional levels in defining learning outcomes. Several states, including Indiana, have made an effort to define for the classroom teacher those learning outcomes or competencies that will lead to the desired proficiency at each level of instruction (6).

It should also be pointed out that proficiency has been a recurring theme in many of the national assessments that have appeared over the past several years. The Task Force of the Twentieth Century Fund points out, for example, that "every American public school student should have the opportunity to achieve proficiency in a second language" (2). The concept of proficiency, outside the profession at least, may mean some-

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thing quite different than what foreign language educators have in the past viewed as essential learning outcomes. Rather than the ability to master isolated vocabulary and certain grammatical and structural concepts, proficiency means the "spontaneous use of language and productive cultural interaction" (Higgs, 1). It is this concept of "productive cultural interaction," an outcome that results from communicating in or "spontaneously using" the second language, on which the Indiana guidelines have been based. It was felt by the Indiana group involved in the development of its guidelines that the cultural component of language learning cannot be isolated but must remain an integral part in defining the particular competencies that are to produce desired proficiencies at various levels of instruction.

The Development Process and the Format of the Guidelines

To achieve this necessary interaction of communication and culture in defining desired learning outcomes, the Indiana Task Force on Foreign Languages determined that such learning outcomes will need to be expressed in terms of communicative competencies and organized under generic cultural contexts. Thus, the guidelines define the proficiency to be achieved at each level of instruction by specifying 25 to 30 communicative competencies that the student will need in order to function as a user of the target language. These competencies are further categorized by the cultural context in which they may be needed. The first step in the process of developing the guidelines, therefore, was to identify these cultural contexts. Based on broad, general cultural topics that are common to a majority of the modern foreign language textbooks adopted in Indiana, nine such contexts were identified: Travel/Transportation; the "World" of the Target Language; School and Education; Family and Home; Leisure Time; Meeting Personal Needs; World of Work; Fine Arts; and Politics and History. The cultural contexts were, in turn, more precisely defined by specific cultural situations such as ordering a meal in a restaurant, getting around in a city, obtaining lodging, etc. The communicative competency under each cultural context and within each specific cultural situation is a short description of what students should be able to do at the end of the level of instruction. The basic task is also defined with a list of language skills necessary to achieve the competency; the linguistic con-

tent, i.e., grammar and vocabulary necessary; and a suggested evaluation schema.

To illustrate a variety of competencies and how they relate to various generic cultural contexts, the four examples below come from each level of instruction.

1. **Level:** One
   Generic Cultural Context: Meeting Personal Needs
   Specific Cultural Situation: "Small Talk"
   Basic Task: Self-expression, states of being
   Communicative Competence: Given a series of situations, a student will respond by describing his/her state of being.
   Examples:
   It's 7:00 p.m. and you didn't have lunch. (I'm hungry.)
   It's December and you are waiting for a bus. (I'm cold.)
   You have been playing soccer all afternoon. (I'm tired.)
   Skill(s): Listening/Speaking
   Linguistic Content: Vocabulary: adjectives, expressions and idioms related to states of being. Structure: expressions of states of being
   Evaluation Schema: Structural Accuracy of Communication scale
2. **Level:** Two
   Generic Cultural Context: Family and Home
   Specific Cultural Situation: Entertaining
   Basic Task: Applying learned information
   Communicative Competence: Roleplaying a situation in which he/she will be hosting a foreign student for a weekend, the student will plan at least one day of meals and activities (e.g., meeting family friends, touring the city, etc.).
   Skill(s): Writing
   Linguistic Content: Vocabulary: meals, foods, dishes, beverages, activities, places. Structure: telling time, subordination, future tense, sequencing
   Evaluation Schema: Accuracy of written work
3. **Level:** Three
   Generic Cultural Context: Fine Arts
   Specific Cultural Situation: Visual Arts

Basic Task: Applying learned information

Communicative Competence: Simulating a visit to a famous museum (e.g., the Prado, the Louvre), the student will roleplay a tour guide, describing each of several works and their artists in two or three sentences each.

Skill(s): Reading/Speaking

Evaluation Schema: Comprehensibility rating scale

4. **Level:** Four

Generic Cultural Context: History and Politics

Specific Cultural Situation: Current Movements

Basic Task: Organizing information

Communicative Competence: The student, using popular print media, will research the various points of view on a contemporary political movement in the target culture (e.g., the antinuclear movement, women's liberation, elections, etc.) and contrast them.

Skill(s): Reading/Writing

Evaluation Schema: Structural Accuracy of Communication rating scale plus the Amount of Relevant Information rating scale

While the above examples illustrate types of competencies in a variety of cultural contexts and at the four levels of instruction, another aspect that was addressed in developing the guidelines was the need for certain competencies to be reentered throughout the sequence.

An example of reentry occurs under the generic cultural context of Travel/Transportation. In Level One a competency requires the student to name the various modes of transportation he or she "used" in traveling from place to place based on an imaginary itinerary given to the student. In Level Two the student uses a bus or train schedule to identify a tour he or she wants to take by describing the time of departure, the length of the trip, some key features, and the time of return. In Level Three communicative skills in this cultural context are expanded further by requiring the student to select a famous tourist attraction and describe it as if he or she were a tour guide. In Level Four the communicative competency states: "Given an opening statement such as 'If I were a millionaire,' the student will describe his or her fantasy trip around the world, explaining the choices made."

Thus, an attempt has been made to assure that certain competencies introduced at lower levels will continue to be refined and expanded at higher levels. At this point it should also be noted that a level is defined as one year of instruction in grades 9–12, two years in junior high or middle school, and three years in the intermediate grades (4–6).

A very important component of the guidelines is the evaluation schema described for each communicative competency. These are provided to assist the teacher in evaluating each competency and to encourage the development of a classroom testing program that will measure the global communicative skills described in each competency. As is pointed out in the guidelines: "Pencil-and-paper fill-in-the-blank tests are not capable of measuring global communicative skills, that is, communicative competencies, in reading, writing, listening, and especially speaking" (6).

Because teachers on the task force felt that existing rating scales were too complex, difficult, and time-consuming for use in a classroom situation, rating scales were devised to aid the teacher in the evaluation process. Simplified versions of existing scales along with one new scale were developed in four areas: comprehensibility, amount of relevant information, structural accuracy, and level of performance. For each scale there is a general definition along with three "scale level definitions." Points assigned to each level were arbitrarily chosen as one point for the lowest level, three points for the second level, and five points for the highest level. The designation of points for each scale level in this way allows for a broader numerical range of scores and eliminates the need to work with fractional or decimal scores. The scales, therefore, are actually five-point scales with a definition provided for the lowest, mid-level, and highest. The four scales that were developed follow.

Scale for Comprehensibility

General Definition: Comprehensibility refers to the ability of the student to convey meaning and to make himself or herself understood.

Scale Definitions	*Points*
Comprehended some phrases or word clusters	1
Comprehended short simple sentences	3
Comprehended all of what student said or wrote	5

Scale for Amount of Relevant Information

General Definition: Amount of communication refers to the quantity of information relevant to the communicative situation the student is able to convey.

Scale Definitions	*Points*
Very little relevant information was conveyed by student	1
A fair amount of relevant information was conveyed	3
Most or all relevant information was conveyed by student	5

Scale for Structural Accuracy of Communication

General Definition: Structural accuracy of communication refers to the linguistic (grammatical) correctness of the student's statements.

Scale Definitions	*Points*
Very few statements were structurally correct	1
Many statements were structurally correct	3
Most or all statements were structurally correct	5

Scale for Level of Performance

General Definition: The purpose of this scale is to evaluate whether or not the student is performing at the level of the class for which he or she is enrolled. *This scale should only be used at the higher levels of instruction—Level III and above.* Although the student may perform well on the three previous scales, his or her performance may still reflect very simple language in terms of structure and syntax and thus he or she does not meet the criteria for a Level III or above class. This is a scale for a Level III student.

Scale Definitions	*Points*
The communication is more appropriate to Level I with minimal responses, the use of simple sentences, and frequent requests for slowed speech or repetition of the question(s).	1
The communication is more appropriate to Level II, for although the student converses somewhat more extensively than a rank beginner, he or she does not provide details or use compound or complex sentences.	3

The communication is appropriate to Level III, in the amount of communication, the use of compound and/or complex sentences, and the more detailed information. 5

In adjusting the scale for use with Level IV students, the teacher might use Levels II, III, and IV, by adding "The communication is appropriate to Level IV, for the student is an interesting communicator, providing details, solving problems, improvising as necessary, and persuading or arguing as necessary."

It should be noted that the kinds of rating scales described above are not necessarily applicable to or usable with every communicative competency. Those competencies involving the receptive skills—listening comprehension and reading—may best be evaluated by testing instruments and procedures already being utilized by teachers or those published to accompany textbooks.

Developing Culturally Oriented, Competency-Based Curricula

The Indiana Modern Foreign Language Generic Competencies Levels I–IV (6), like the specific-language guidelines now in the process of development, use the word *proficiency* to describe the learner's global abilities at the end of a set term of instruction. The guidelines specify, for example, that by the end of Level One, a modern foreign language student should be able to do the following:

1. Participate in brief conversations on familiar topics, with some concentration, meeting very basic travel and personal needs, using simple sentences, and asking for slowed speech or repetition when necessary.
2. Comprehend the spoken language in the form of directions, commands, questions, structured conversations, and simple narrative descriptions.
3. Read graded narrative and cultural materials on familiar topics.
4. Write any language that can be produced orally.
5. Understand the appropriate behavior and etiquette in a limited number of social situations.
6. Demonstrate increasing awareness of other world areas and views.

The word *competency*, on the other hand, is used to denote some finite use to which the learner can put the language, a function he or she can perform. The generic guidelines define approximately 30 competencies for each level of instruction.

Once teachers have familiarized themselves with the Indiana state guidelines, they must establish those competencies that will constitute each level of instruction in the sequences offered in their schools. In some situations, this will be done by a consensus of the teachers in a school district and in others, by an individual teacher.

Realism says that Levels One and Two will consist of 20 to 25 competencies. Levels Three and Four, given the greater complexity of the performances required, will consist of 15 to 20 competencies.

Through no overt design, the definition of the competencies led to the capability to distinguish among the levels. Each level of competencies produces a pattern with its own character.

Level One: Developing Basic Survival Skills
Level Two: Experiencing the Culture(s) Vicariously
Level Three: Using the Language as a Vehicle for Learning
Level Four: Expanding One's Personal and Intellectual Horizons

This kind of diversification of the purposes of each level is another contribution to developing student and public understanding of what kinds of proficiency can be expected at each stage of the sequence.

As teachers define the competencies comprising the curriculum at each level or year of instruction, they will have to study two levels (i.e., Levels One and Two or Levels Two and Three) to find the best fit with their instructional priorities and teaching materials. In the process they will find that they can take many of the competencies directly from the state guidelines, but they will also have to compose some of their own using the state competencies as models.

One point must be made clear. Testing and evaluation should not be withheld until the end of the term, even though the *collective* competencies make up a proficiency level to be attained at the end of a given term of instruction. The competencies, most of which represent activities that good teachers are already using in their classes, are meant to be tested and evaluated as it becomes appropriate—throughout the year.

Lesson Planning in Culturally Oriented, Competency-Based Instruction

To illustrate the lesson planning elements needed to implement competency-based instruction, the Level One competency of Food and Meals from the generic cultural context of Travel/Transportation will be used. That competency is as follows:

> Given an authentic menu, the student will listen to a conversation in which two people are ordering a meal and indicate on his/her copy of the menu what each has ordered.

In preparing the students to meet competencies, the teacher should use all the exercises and drills occurring in the textbook. Because of current increased emphasis on listening comprehension in the early levels, there should be the same emphasis on drills and practice.

Teachers may want to incorporate the kinds of listening activities suggested in the draft copy of the New York State Syllabus *Modern Languages for Secondary Schools* (3):

> Given a series of 15 sets of pictures (four to a set) of fruits and vegetables (meat, poultry, and seafood; beverages), the student is able to demonstrate listening comprehension by matching the appropriate picture in each set with a preceding oral stimulus.

Because reading menus seldom involves generic names of foods, teachers should include the kind of menu-reading exercises for students proposed by Phillips (4, p. 287):

1. List the basic food words (which are often different from those in the text vocabulary).
2. List descriptive words.
3. Identify cooking method words, such as *broil*, *fry*, and *roast*.
4. List eye appeal words, such as *golden brown*, *ripe*, and *fresh*.
5. List size words, such as *jumbo* and *petite*.
6. Identify such specialty words as *Neapolitan*, *Maurice*, and *chef's*.

There must be practices in menu-reading in which students identify main ingredients in dishes so that they are able to read menus intelligently and express some likes and dislikes.

No one should make the mistake, however, of not providing speaking and writing practice to meet this competency, as well as listening and reading experiences. Students need every kind of reinforcement at all times. Because the listening competency involves a menu, the teacher may want to conduct either or both of the following activities:

1. A small-group activity for three in which students alternate roles, two serving as customers and one as a waiter or waitress recording their orders.
2. A chain drill in which students take turns ordering appetizers, entrées, desserts, and so on, with each student in class selecting two students whose orders he or she is to record.

Because the competency asks students to listen to a conversation between two people ordering a meal, a recording of such a conversation is needed. If this is not a component of the textbook tapes, teachers may ask more advanced students to perform this task as a recorded speaking activity and then select the best tape (or have the student select it). Others who may help provide such a recording are teacher candidates on field experiences, student teachers, or colleagues.

The advantage of this competency is that the entire class can perform at one time—and the whole performance will not take more than five or ten minutes.

When the students reach the second level, the reentered competency is a speaking/reading exercise rather than a listening/reading one and it has a problem-solving dimension:

> Given an authentic menu and a set amount of money to spend, the student will, with the teacher serving as waiter or waitress, order a complete meal he or she can afford.

As preparation for this activity, students will need the same basic preparation they needed for Level One competency, but they will need a variety of drills on the currency to help them deal with that facet of the problem. Here are some activities that may help students:

1. A small-group activity of four in which students rotate roles—three serving as customers, one as waiter or waitress. Each customer adds up his or her bill and the waiter or waitress adds them all.

2. A chain drill in which students take turns ordering meals and tallying checks.
3. A written exercise in which students must order three complete meals and tally the checks for each. (These could be a breakfast, lunch, and dinner, or three lunches or three dinners.)

This competency is not difficult to administer. The teacher, waiter, or waitress can wait on three or four students at a time—while others are practicing with a tape or preparing a written exercise due at the end of the period.

While students in Level One can express simple likes and dislikes, by the time they reach Level Three, they should be able to express dissatisfaction and ask for redress. In Level Three, then, there is a more complex competency:

> Given an authentic menu, the students in threes will role-play a situation in a restaurant in which several facets of the service are unsatisfactory.

Students may be prepared for this competency through problem-posing situations such as the following:

1. A table setting is missing. A fork is missing at one place and a napkin at another. What comment would you make and what would you ask the waiter or waitress?
2. There is a dirty dish and lipstick on your cup or glass. How would you approach the waiter or waitress?
3. The service is very slow. Your two friends have been served their entrées and all but finished their meal, but you have not yet been served. How would you point out the problem to the waiter or waitress?

These would be good topics to "negotiate" in small groups in order to explore the full range of possible responses to the problems posed.

This type of situation lends itself very well to role playing. Students may be assigned their roles on 3″ x 5″ cards.

> Boy: This is your first date with this girl and you want to impress her. Order only the most expensive items on the menu.
>
> Girl: This is your first date with this boy and you are very nervous. Order only what he orders.

Waiter or Waitress: Let both customers order, then have only one serving available.

This type of structuring builds in some of the spontaneity of real-life experiences. Since waiters and waitresses usually take a woman's order first, the girl will have to find out what her date is going to have in order to replicate it. Both customers will then have to negotiate who gets the one serving available and make another selection.

If the teacher wants another kind of competency for either Level Two or Level Three, he or she might require students to order meals for a set amount of money or evaluate with a rating scale their small talk throughout the meal, for that type of casual exchange is all too often neglected in the classroom.

Conclusion

The Indiana Modern Foreign Language Generic Competencies Levels I–IV (6) have three basic goals:

1. To establish what proficiency is at the end of each level of instruction through sets of competencies or learning outcomes to be achieved throughout that level of instruction.
2. To define progress throughout the sequence in terms that students and the public can readily understand.
3. To integrate culture and communication at every level of instruction in the sequence.

The superordinate goal, however, is to produce students who are communicatively competent and culturally sensitive in their dealings with native speakers in this country and as travelers, students, or workers abroad. It is our strong feeling that one cannot establish proficiency tests until a proficiency-oriented, competency-based curriculum has been designed and is being implemented.

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